

Chapter 1: The Covenant

Michel Foucault was famously skeptical about the possibility of a genuine resistance to power. He wrote, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”¹ In other words, every attempt at resistance merely constitutes another expression of power, and therefore power is never really challenged. But is Foucault correct? Is a position of resistance “outside” of power really unthinkable? It is the assertion of this book that resistance, in discourse and in ethical action, can be and has been achieved by a conceptualization—and, as we shall see, emulation—of a subjective position “exterior” to power. Further, this book argues that both the grounds for this possibility and the model for its realization are found uniquely in the Bible, beginning with its very first pages in Genesis.

To clarify this thesis, let us begin by considering the way in which the composition of Genesis itself constituted a work of resistance. Millard Lind has noted that the creation narratives in Genesis break with similar originary narratives of the period in their refusal to unite cosmogony and politics. It is significant, he says, that the genealogical lists of Adam’s descendants do not attempt to render the first humans as ancestors of only the Israelites or of the Israelite monarchy, in sharp contrast to similar texts from other Near East cultures.² For example, creation narratives such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* or the *Memphite Theology* employ originary myths to lend a divine aura to the hegemony of particular cities. With source materials dating to the time before the monarchy, Genesis 1:1-2:3 (written by the Priestly writer, P) and Genesis 2:4b-25 (written by the Yahwist, J) culminate in the creation of humanity, not the establishment of a primeval Hebrew kingdom. What is truly

remarkable, says Lind, is that these “archaic” narratives were redacted during the period of Israel’s kingship and yet were not “modernized” to give the coercive state a sheen of cosmological provenance.³

Although the J document is widely thought to date from the early monarchy period, the composition of P has traditionally been placed in the Second Temple Period, with its redaction into the Bible occurring as late as the fifth century BC.⁴ This would perhaps explain the less nationalistic cosmogony of Genesis 1 as a concession to political weakness rather than the expression of any theo-political ideal. But Richard Elliot Friedman argues for a composition of P at an earlier date, during the reign of King Hezekiah (715-687 BC).⁵ Under that timeline, Lind’s observation holds for both creation narratives, and the paradox of a universalistic cosmogony being preserved during a time of national sovereignty must be accepted as an extraordinary fact.

If Foucault is right, how is it that the Genesis scribes managed to “resist” divinizing human power, even that of Israel’s own leaders, when the *Zeitgeist* encouraged such a treatment? The answer is that their very subject constituted a position “exterior to power,” that is, the God who creates the universe but is not identical to—or immanent within—the universe. His externality to the world, combined with his eternal omnipotence, constitutes a fixed subjective position capable of judging power by standards other than human ones. This is the divine *external/eternal* position, and it is the basis not only for the redactors’ resistance to nationalist pressures but also for the critical view of power that permeates the entire Bible, from first book to last.

In Genesis, this power-critical perspective hovers over the account of human history that follows the Fall and determines the narrative’s focus on the association between violence and the rise of culture. That connection is established in the story of Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel, and René Girard’s anthropological analysis of that account provides an excellent baseline for our more power-focused approach. Girard concedes that Cain’s homicidal act—followed by his founding of a city—bears close resemblance to the “founding-murder” myths that trace the origin of many cultures to a primeval act of homicide. An obvious analogue is the myth of Romulus, who founds Rome after he has slain his twin brother Remus.⁶ But Girard reads the story of Cain and Abel as an interpretation of such founding myths, an attempt to expose the mimetic cycle of violence lurking behind the archaic accounts of

communal origins. The Genesis account does so, he posits, by making clear that the slain brother is innocent and the murderous one guilty; Romulus, by contrast, is portrayed in the pagan myth as justified in killing his brother.⁷

Moreover, Girard insists, the biblical narrative evokes the institution of ritual violence within human cultures when God bestows a seal of protection on Cain—that is, the promise to avenge sevenfold anyone who would murder the fratricidal felon. This threat of asymmetrical vengeance, says Girard, refers back to the actual practice of murderous rites at the dawn of culture. When a killing occurred in the Cainite community, multiple victims were slain in commemoration of the original victim, Abel.⁸ In this way the threat of random violence to the community's cohesion was contained by the repetition of controlled acts of violence. Eventually, this societal circuit breaker evolved into the scapegoating mechanism under which communities unanimously agree to blame their ills on a single victim and sacrifice him for the common good.⁹ Thus, Abel's killing can be seen in retrospect to establish an intrinsic relation between human culture and the victimization of innocent individuals. It is precisely this phenomenon, says Girard, that Christ condemns when he refers to Abel as the first of the murdered prophets (Luke 11:51) and to which he himself succumbs on the cross.¹⁰ The scriptural accounts of the crucifixion, Girard asserts, challenge this fundamental cultural pattern by illuminating the enduring link between large social bodies and murders motivated by “the collective error regarding the victim, a misunderstanding caused by violent contagion.”¹¹

Without question, Girard's anthropological analysis goes a long way toward defending the “uniqueness of the Bible”¹² against the tendency of comparative religion scholars to deny the singularity of Christianity's sacred text. For much like Lind, who showed the originality of the scriptural creation narratives, Girard demonstrates that the Bible's portrayal of cultural beginnings breaks rank in key ways with comparable mythological texts.

Nevertheless, his commitment to a “natural, rational interpretation”¹³ proves to be something of a liability since it precludes him from addressing a key element in the biblical narratives he examines—that is, the “holiness” of the victims. As it is, his emphasis on “innocence” implies that the hostility toward biblical targets of collective violence is

irrational and essentially arbitrary. Yet the scriptures seem at pains to make the opposite point, depicting the victims as possessing a very distinctive feature that is offensive to their persecutors—namely, a strong, outwardly detectable relationship with the divine *external/eternal*. In other words, the victims are bearers of holiness, or—to use a term introduced later in Genesis—righteous.

Consider Girard's citation of the passage from Luke characterizing Abel as the ur-prophet. It is repeated in Matthew (23:33-35) but with a significant difference: Abel is described not as a prophet but as "righteous." Girard contends that the Luke passage demonstrates that Christ's condemnation—directed at the Pharisees and teachers of the law—is not inherently anti-Semitic; Abel existed prior to the Abrahamic covenant, and so Christ's diatribe must be taken to encompass all human cultures throughout history.¹⁴ This point is well taken, but the same argument could be made using the passage from Matthew, which has the advantage of remaining truer to the Old Testament text. Abel, after all, is not depicted in Genesis as a prophet in any meaningful sense; what aligns him with the prophets is his righteousness. Descriptions of Abel as "righteous" elsewhere in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:4 and 1 John 3:12) confirm that innocence is not his defining characteristic.

This, in turn, has implications for Girard's interpretation. For if we return to the story of the first murder, it is clear Cain does not kill Abel because of an erroneous judgment but because he correctly discerns that the latter is favored by God. Thus, Girard elides an important nuance in the biblical etiology of the violence-culture link, specifically, the essential antipathy between holiness, as represented by the "righteous" Abel, and culture, as represented by the future city-founder, Cain.

With this facet restored to the narrative, it becomes impossible to reduce Abel's murder to the prototype for Girard's all-against-one ritual victimization of "innocent" people. After all, one can be innocent but not righteous, and Abel is considered in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as righteous. This righteousness, moreover, is not a mere marker of religious difference. It is defined by a relationship with God that, as we shall see, is typically associated in the Bible with a resistance to power and a concomitant critique of culture. It is this understanding that informs the New Testament references to Abel and the prophets; Christ is asserting that the hostility to the "righteous" individual—the person who evinces a relationship with the divine *external/eternal*—has

typified culture since its very beginnings. Understandably, Girard's anthropological focus predisposes him to favor the more secular notion of innocence, but that decision insulates his analysis from the Bible's own emphasis on victims who bear a subjective position inherently at odds with human culture and its propensity for violence.

This is not to say that all victims of unjust violence in the Old Testament are righteous; in fact, many even fail to meet Girard's standard of innocence. Yet special emphasis is undeniably given to the oppression of righteous individuals, and this is so because such cases help explain something important about all cases of victimization. Specifically, they illustrate in a dramatic way the natural association between the human affinity for bloodshed and the aversion to the divine *external/eternal* itself.

We glimpse this link in the story of Lamech, a descendant of Cain who boasts of having killed a young man for wounding him. In this case, the victim was obviously guilty of aggression; he is no Abel. But Lamech's response is just as plainly an instance of disproportionate retaliation. Lamech justifies himself by interpreting God's edict protecting his ancestor as a positive norm for asymmetrical vengeance; hence, "If Cain will be avenged seven times, truly Lamech seventy-seven times" (Gen. 4:24). We saw earlier that Girard interpreted the original decree as reflecting the archaic institution of ritual violence as a regulatory mechanism. In the Lamech episode, he sees evidence that even such ritual safeguards have failed to contain violence in early societies, leading to a propagation of deadly conflicts.¹⁵ From an anthropological standpoint, this interpretation makes sense, but is this what the redactors had in mind?

Given the divine source of the decree protecting the brother-killer, the Cain-Lamech sequence likely has another significance. Indeed, it is inconceivable that the redactors did not intend for God's promise of asymmetrical vengeance to be understood as a preventive measure, an attempt to head off further acts of murder. Therefore, Lamech's subsequent abuse of the edict must be taken to signal the resistance of culture to God's efforts to stop the spread of violence. Moreover, in emphasizing the lop-sided nature of Lamech's retribution, the passage highlights the human propensity to use "justice" as an occasion for venting homicidal impulses; the critique of human justice is an important subtext of the Bible's overall critique of power, as we shall see.

Lamech, then, is symbolic of a human culture whose propensity for violence and perverted justice harden it against the dictates of holiness. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, however, that general antipathy is rendered much more explicitly when the victim is someone with an affinity for the divine *external/eternal*—that is, a righteous individual.

Just how widespread the resistance to holiness is becomes plain when we come to the story of Noah. In this narrative, we meet the one man who can still claim God's favor in a world where violence has become ubiquitous. God's preservation of the "righteous" Noah—the first person in the Bible described as such (Gen. 6:9)—establishes an important theme that will resurface in the dialectic that emerges later in Genesis, that is, the salvation of a holy remnant. In the aftermath of the flood, however, we see the emergence of another dialectical motif, the divine progression away from violence. As we saw in the case of Lamech, God's efforts to quell violence by threatening asymmetrical retribution had the opposite effect because his righteous intent was misinterpreted by his unrighteous creatures. After the flood, when Noah and his family have once again set foot on dry land, God issues a new decree on how the case of a murderer is to be handled:

Whoever sheds man's blood,
his blood will be shed by man,
for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:6)

It is true that the murderer is no longer protected from retribution, as Cain was, but now the retaliation is symmetrical. From a practical standpoint, given the unrighteousness of most human beings, the one-for-one retaliation is still preventive: it limits the escalation of retaliatory violence in communities prone to bloodshed. With this deterrent motive in mind, it is clear that the reference to man's resemblance to God is not intended mainly to justify capital punishment but to serve as a barrier to killing in the first place. It should be pointed out, however, that the innate human affinity with the divine is not quite the same thing as righteousness or, to use a comparable term, holiness. As we shall see, the Bible comes to focus on holiness as the mark of individuals who bear God's image in a very overt and power-critical way.

Thus far in Genesis, we have seen that the Bible views human culture as originating in an act of violence and developing in association with an escalation of violence. We have also seen that human culture from its beginning has been inimical to the righteous or holy individual. In other

words, we can see a critique of culture taking shape in the first chapters of Genesis, a critique grounded in a heretofore informal and simplistic relationship with the divine *external/eternal*. That relationship will become formal in Genesis 12, with the introduction of Abraham. But before then, Genesis pauses with the story of the Tower of Babel.

In Genesis 11, we see something like the Hegelian dialectic of the World Spirit at work in the Tower of Babel, as disparate peoples attempt to merge to form a “higher unity”, that is, create a new synthesis. The effort is thwarted by God, and thus we see the Bible both identifying a dialectical movement of worldly power and positing a countervailing force outside of power, that is, the divine *external/eternal* position. What is remarkable in this account is that it depicts the pursuit of greater unity as a mass phenomenon; there is no authoritarian leader organizing the tower construction. As Lind points, out, the fact that J, the author of this section of Genesis, does not equate the city-state with kingship, indicates that the writer saw the problem of power in non-monarchical terms.¹⁶ Thus, the Yahwist anticipates by millennia Foucault’s own location of power within the network of human relations and not in a hierarchy headed by a monarchical figure.¹⁷

It is Girard’s work, however, that prepares us to recognize an important background for the Babel story that Lind glosses over. For if J is critical of the would-be tower-builders, it is not merely because the power that unites them is cut off from God’s guidance; it is also because—absent such oversight—the field of operation for that power is a culture unremittingly predisposed to bloodshed and sacrifice. It is with this cultural ground in mind that, going forward, we will refer to the historical unfolding of earthly power relations as the *culture-power* dialectic.

Already, then, we can discern that the central tension emerging in the Bible’s first book is not between holiness and a certain kind of power but between holiness and power in general, as it functions within human cultures dependent on violence. When God thwarts the tower-building project by transforming the monolingual masses into a polyglot population, he operates in an anti-Hegelian direction, revealing a disdain for the higher unities for which power constantly strives. In the process, he determines that, going forward, one key imperative of power will be the identification or promotion of difference to mediate. As for his own priorities, the deity of Genesis remains concerned primarily with the

righteous individual, a figure whose weakness in the world God recognizes as the basis for perfecting a new kind of human existence.

Indeed, with Abraham, Genesis begins unveiling a radical alternative to a cultural organizations based on human power and violence. This distinction is communicated at the outset when God calls Abraham away from his own city and makes him a wayfarer, a man without a country. In contrast to the centripetal direction of the Babel masses toward unity, Abraham's course, determined by God, is centrifugal, away from the masses. In this way, Abraham effectively embodies the notion that righteousness must exist apart from culture. That such a culture-critical aspect was preserved in the Abraham narrative is remarkable given that the redactor was compiling the text at a time when Israel had achieved an advanced cultural position.¹⁸ In fact, Lind discerns a conscious effort to contrast the Babylonian city-state model for achieving human unity with the covenant God makes with Abraham. He notes for example, that similar phrases occur in both the compact among the would-be tower-builders in Genesis 11 and in God's call of Abraham but with a key difference: in the Babel narrative, the use of third and first-person plural pronouns (they, we, us) predominates, whereas in the call of Abraham, Yahweh is the subject and the first-person singular pronoun prevails.¹⁹ For Lind, the subtle difference points up a great distinction between the self-determined and self-interested strivings of the Babel community and the God-directed, faith-dependent path of Abraham and the nation that will arise from his seed. The latter, he asserts, "points toward a type of theo-political unity that represented an alternative to the coercive empire types of the Near East."²⁰ Put in dialectical terms, Abraham represents a refusal of synthesis with the *culture-power* dialectic observed in the Babel episode.

For our purposes, though, it is more important to note that in calling Abraham away from his people, God is in effect calling the patriarch to emulate his own external position to the development of temporal power. Abraham's "righteousness"—his holiness—consists in just this melding of a relationship to the eternal with an externality to power. The patriarch thus comes to substantiate a culture-critical position—modeled on God's own divine *external/eternal* position—from the outset of the covenant, something that Hegel recognizes in his own negative characterization of the patriarch as spurning "the bonds of communal life and love."²¹ Thus, holiness is presented in Genesis as being

inherently grounded in an *external/eternal* position of power-critical potential.

On first glance it might seem paradoxical to suggest Abraham is in effect emulating God's position vis-à-vis power and culture even as he adopts a position of weakness, that of a wayfarer. But in fact, Genesis shows God modeling this movement toward weakness in the very act of establishing the covenant with Abraham, a detail easily missed without the historical context of covenant traditions extant in Abraham's time and place. According to George E. Mendenhall, the covenants employed by Abraham's Hittite contemporaries took two basic forms: a *suzerainty* treaty, in which an inferior is bound by an oath to fulfill certain obligations to a ruler; and a *parity* treaty, in which two parties—typically rulers—are obligated to fulfill similar terms in relation to each other.²² What is remarkable about the Abrahamic covenant, Mendenhall points out, is its unique departure from these legal paradigms: "Both in the narrative of Genesis 15 and 17, and in the later references to this covenant, it is clearly stated or implied that it is Yahweh himself who swears to certain promises to be carried out in the future. It is not often enough seen that no obligations are imposed upon Abraham."²³ In other words, God assumes the contractual position traditionally held by the vassal in undertaking his pact with Abraham!

As Mendenhall points out, the picture is quite different when it comes to the subsequent covenant of Moses, with its exhausting enumeration of obligations for the liberated Hebrews and merely implicit promise of God's support.²⁴ But this should not tempt us to view the patriarchal pact as devoid of ethical significance for the human beneficiaries. On the contrary, God's promise to stand by Abraham and his seed—no matter what—establishes a rational basis for assuming the weaker position in dealings with people outside of the covenant. In other words, the divine "grace" underlying the Abrahamic pact supplies an unprecedented justification for adopting a policy of patience and nonaggression toward antagonists as opposed to following pagan standards of behavior. This explains why Abraham and the other patriarchs are largely represented as loath to assert themselves or defend their rights; they prefer to remain passive while trusting in God to uphold their interests.

That such pacifism makes poor material for conventional heroic myths goes without saying. Three mirror narratives, for example,

involve Abraham (Genesis 12:10-20 and 20:1-17) or Isaac (Genesis 26:7-11) passing off his wife as his sister, and in the case of the former, watching helplessly as the wife is confiscated by the local ruler. Max Weber characterizes the patriarchs' lack of boldness as "the herdsman's utilitarian pacifism."²⁵ But certainly the redactors had something more in mind than preserving a trio of narratives that portray a primitive, ungallant ethic. A radical trust in God is no doubt one idea being conveyed, but given the precedent of Abel and Noah, it is significant that, in each case, the patriarch is motivated by fear of being killed by the local citizens. Clearly, a thematic thread being carried through in these narratives is the hostility of culture—and, by extension, power—toward the righteous individual.

The eventual return of the wives provides a kind of comic relief—all's well that ends well—but the events preceding that resolution drive home the strong identification between God and his chosen ones. In the case of Abraham, his unique relation to God is manifested by the supernatural interventions that follow Sarah's confiscation: plagues trouble Pharaoh's household, and Abimelech is warned in a menacing dream. In Isaac's case, Abimelech recognizes the ruse before anyone can act on desire for Rebekah and subsequently chastises Isaac for the dangerous, immoral situation that he almost facilitated. What the rulers all express in their varied ways is the recognition of a special divine affinity for these solitary wayfarers. In other words, the rulers—the representatives of temporal authority—recognize the patriarchs as dependents of the divine *external/eternal* entity that stands apart from and judges power.

What they do not recognize in the patriarchs—and this again goes to Girard's thesis—is an absence of guilt. The deceitful ploys of Abraham and Isaac are shown to be the source of the plagues that afflict or threaten to afflict the rulers who have confiscated Sarah and Rebekah. Hence, the common response of the rulers once the ruse is revealed: "What have you done to us?" That it is the rulers who are guiltless in each case is made especially clear in Genesis 20 after God reveals to Abimelech Sarah's true relation to Abraham and the mortal danger her married state poses to him. The king defends his honor by pointing out that he was the victim of the couple's deception: "I have done this in the integrity of my heart and the *innocence* of my hands" (Gen. 20:5; emphasis mine). What's more, Abimelech's assertion that he acted in good conscience based on the information given him is not disputed by

God but rather confirmed (Gen. 20:6). In the later account involving Isaac, Abimelech chastises Rebekah's husband for nearly bringing "guilt on us." (Genesis 26:10). In each case, the culpability is shown to fall indisputably on the side of the patriarchs, a signal that the righteousness derived from the *external/eternal* relationship overlaps only somewhat with conventional ethics.

Yet if Genesis depicts the patriarchs as less than moral virtuosos, it does not present their deceptive practices as the sole, or even the main, source of provocation to their neighbors. What is most troubling to the local denizens, especially the rulers, is the patriarch's surprising success, which gives evidence of their affiliation with the divine *external/eternal*. Both Abraham and Isaac are confronted with this pagan anxiety, but Isaac's experience receives a much more elaborate treatment. The longer account is worth examining in full because its paradox-filled sequence of events constitutes one of the strangest—and, in relation to the *culture-power* dialectic, most illuminating—narratives in the whole book of Genesis, if not the entire Bible.

The chain of incidents in question follows immediately upon King Abimelech's discovery of the marital relation between Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac now enters into a period of prosperity in the region, and his success antagonizes the local population, leading to Abimelech's request that he move away because "you are much mightier than we" (Gen. 26:16) The irony, of course, is that Abimelech is already aware of Isaac's non-assertiveness based on the Rebekah episode, but he insists on seeing in Isaac a potential rival. Nevertheless, Isaac continues to undermine Abimelech's supposition, at first by complying with the king's request without hesitation, and then by refusing to assert himself in a conflict with local herdsmen over the ownership of wells he has dug. When faced with a similar well-related conflict in Genesis 21:22-31, Abraham asserted his rights and signed a treaty with Abimelech; not so Isaac. Whenever the herdsmen claim one of his wells, Isaac moves on and digs a new well, and he keeps doing so until his adversaries stop making counterclaims. He is steadfast in his nonresistance.

So it strikes the reader as more than a little bizarre that Isaac's passivity elicits a visit from King Abimelech and his emissaries, who are, inexplicably, even more fearful that he will challenge for dominion of Gerar. To be sure, reading Genesis 26, one almost gets the sense that two unrelated narratives have been spliced together. Isaac is consistent in

avoiding confrontation in any form, and the herdsmen obviously see Isaac as a pushover, yet the most powerful man in the region continually responds to Isaac with fear and anxiety. If Isaac's submissiveness strikes some modern readers as a moral flaw, within the narrative, it signifies something altogether different.

Exactly what that significance is we begin to glimpse when Abimelech, seemingly without any compelling reason, implores the pacifist Isaac to sign a treaty of peace. Isaac himself is at a loss as to why the king and his men are behaving in this manner: "Isaac said to them, 'Why have you come to me, since you hate me, and have sent me away from you?' They said, 'We saw plainly that Yahweh was with you. We said, "Let there now be an oath between us, even between us and you, and let's make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, as we have not touched you, and as we have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace." You are now the blessed of Yahweh'" (Gen. 26: 27-29). And indeed, just after the episode of the wells and just prior to Abimelech's visit, God had appeared to Isaac and assured him that he would be blessed.

What is going on in this passage, in which Isaac's unheroic passivity is both blessed by God (as if it were virtuous) *and* interpreted as a form of aggression by the key figure of power in the region? At the very least, it signifies that Isaac understands that God's blessings are not dependent on his own assertiveness or ambition. To have chosen violence, for example, in response to the herdsmen confiscating his wells would have been a display of mistrust in God's promises to provide for him. One might say that the incommensurability of natural morality and covenantal morality is implied here.

But from the perspective of the *culture-power* dialectic, what is ultimately so threatening about Isaac is his embodiment of the *external/eternal* position, attested to by his special relation to God: in Abimelech's words, he is "the blessed of Yahweh." Without question, it is a curious paradox of the narrative that the more *external* to power Isaac becomes, that is, the farther away he moves from the center of culture, the more menacing he becomes to the regional authority. However, his externality, in and of itself, is not the reason Abimelech is hostile to him; it is his refusal to rely on the methods of temporal power to achieve his ends that terrifies the king. In other words, Isaac is perceived as a challenge to power because he is *outside* of power ethically as well as

physically. Isaac's pacifism is inextricably linked to his total dependence on God for his success, and thus his separateness from a culture dependent on violence anchors a position of holiness—emulating the *external/eternal*—that stands in a revelatory, critical position to power.

To be sure, Isaac's willingness to concede continually to the herdsmen deprives King Abimelech of one of power's most vaunted claims to necessity, namely, its ability to mediate differences and to provide justice. Abimelech's anxiety, therefore, is not paradoxical after all: Isaac's success *outside of power* calls into question the very premises of the necessity of power and violence, which is an assault on the mythos that binds all human cultures to coercive authority. The pacifist patriarchs do, in fact, represent a threat to the earthly regime. As we shall see in the stories of other righteous figures, this challenge will rarely escape the notice of those in power, who typically respond as Abimelech does: by trying to contain the menace of a God-dependent alternative to their rule.

The story of this alternative continues with Isaac's son Jacob, a patriarch whose exploits add new dimensions to the dovish profile of righteousness his forebears pioneered. One particular trait—an unprecedented wiliness—comes to the fore as Jacob updates the patriarchal propensity for guile with some intriguing twists. For Jacob employs deception as part of a more varied program of trickery and executes his schemes not out of fear—as was the case with Abraham and Isaac—but from pure ambition. He dupes his brother Esau into selling his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew (Gen. 25:29-34) and subsequently secures his father's blessing by audaciously impersonating his hirsute sibling. Later, he invokes a form of sympathetic magic—made efficacious by God, we are told—to enhance his livestock holdings at the expense of his father-in-law Laban (Gen. 30:31-43). Given Jacob's craftiness, one is tempted to infer that holiness is a quality inevitably associated with underhandedness. But precluding that interpretation is the fact that Jacob himself is deceived by the unrighteous Laban, who tricks his nephew into marrying his older daughter Leah and making the young man wait seven years to wed the younger, lovelier Rachel (Gen. 29:16-30). So what is the reader to make of Jacob's morally problematic adventures?

To locate the answer, we have to return to the birth of the brothers and the prophecy that the nation founded by the older son would “serve

the younger" (Gen. 25:23). This prognostication comes to seem farfetched when we read the description of the brothers as adults: the older Esau is characterized as a "skillful hunter, a man of the field," while the younger Jacob is painted as "a quiet man, living in tents" (Gen. 25: 27). It is hard to imagine the taciturn homebody Jacob achieving a position of dominance over the rugged outdoorsman Esau, especially since the latter is favored by Isaac. But it is precisely Jacob's nonaggressive nature that marks him as the more fitting vessel for the covenantal relationship Isaac must pass on to a new generation. For as we have seen, the bearers of the promise evince an aversion to confrontation, trusting in God's providence rather than their own might. It is in this light that we can recognize the harmony between Jacob's holy potential and his reliance on ruses and stratagems; his usurpation of his brother, like his subsequent plundering of his father-in-law, is undoubtedly devious, but it involves no bloodshed. Jacob's trickery, then, is a reflection of the nonviolent nature that makes him more suitable to bear the covenantal mantle than his brother Esau. This interpretation is seconded by Isaac's prediction that his hoodwinked older son will "live by [his] sword" even as he serves his younger sibling (Gen. 27:40); the blessed Jacob, we presume, will continue living by his wits and eschewing violent clashes.

To be sure, it's a significant detail that no sooner does Jacob secure the blessing from his father than he becomes a fugitive, on the lam from his brothers' indignant wrath. Yet if eagerness to avoid confrontation is what motivates his flight, its ultimate end is the completion of his righteousness. For just as Isaac received a vision from God after moving far enough from his neighbors to avoid disputes over his wells, Jacob receives a similar vision shortly after taking leaving of his parents to escape Esau's revenge (Gen.28:10-22). In the covenantal journey of both father and son, the movement away from conflict and potential violence coincides with a total dependence on God, a key precondition for the *external/eternal* relationship.²⁶

That Jacob fully understands holiness and weakness to be complementary is underscored during another flight—this time from his father-in-law Laban. Setting out to establish an independent life with his family, he is forced to enter his brother's territory and risk an encounter he has avoided for decades. But rather than prepare for war, he sends ahead a lavish gift of livestock and a message that announces the arrival of Esau's "servant, Jacob" (Gen. 32: 13-18). When the brothers finally

meet face to face, Jacob refers to Esau as “my Lord” and likens his brother’s face to “the face of God” (Gen. 33:8-10). The obsequious deference to Esau depicted in this passage is quite dramatic, so much so that it vexed Jewish interpreters centuries later. According to Lind, Talmudic scholars saw fit to reprimand the patriarch for evincing behavior—toward the father of the Edomites no less—totally inconsistent with “the spirit of nationalism” befitting a father of Israel.²⁷ Such a negative view of Jacob is ironic, given that his passivity—unlike his ambition-fueled penchant for trickery—is totally in keeping with the patriarchal paradigm established by Abraham and Isaac. This criticism also misses the affinity of Jacob’s servile attitude with God’s own self-condescension in his dealings with Abraham. Yet if readers—both ancient and contemporary—are taken aback by Jacob’s failure to act like a conventional warrior prince, he himself is clearly unafraid to buck conventional moral expectations as he pursues a prosperity that is vouchsafed by God and, for that very reason, untainted by violence. Therein lies his righteousness; his innocence, *pace* Girard, remains an open question.

Of course, standing in seeming contradiction to these and other examples of patriarchal pacifism are a few examples of, or references to, patriarchal self-assertion or violence. In some cases, it must be pointed out, the antithesis is only apparent. Take the intriguing instance of patriarchal aggression that occurs in Genesis 32:22-32 when Jacob wrestles with the angel on the night before he is to meet his brother Esau. What is striking about this passage is that it immediately precedes the fawning genuflection before Esau that, as we saw, so offended the nationalist sensibilities of Talmudic experts. Given this sequence, it is highly unlikely that the wrestling bout in Genesis 34 was intended by the redactors to demonstrate Jacob’s assertiveness. The clue to the real significance is provided by the blessing that Jacob wins through his tenacity. As we saw earlier in this chapter, God assumed a position of weakness in relation to Abraham when he made his covenant with him. Now God, in the form of the angel, once more assumes a position of weakness in relation to Abraham’s grandson Jacob. Thus, the incident of the wrestling match, far from interrupting the emerging link between weakness and holiness, advances it; we are reminded that God is not afraid to choose weakness in relation to his holy ones. The fact that Jacob’s hip is wrenched during the tussle and that he limps afterward

only underscores the theme observed already in Abraham's and Isaac's stories, namely, that the righteous emulate the weakness God himself adopts in his dealings with them.

Abraham's defeat of the kings of the East in Genesis 14 constitutes a much stronger challenge to the theme of patriarchal pacifism. But the account's anomalous relation to the other Abrahamic materials, manifest particularly in the absence of a divine call to arms, makes it the exception that proves the rule. Indeed, its picture of a self-reliant and sword-wielding Abraham, joining with local rulers instead of standing apart from them, has led Gard Granerød to propose a late composition for the passage, probably by a Jewish militant nationalist writing in the Persian or early Hellenistic period.²⁸ Granerød argues further that the Melchizedek episode (Gen. 14:18-20) that follows Abraham's victorious return is an even later addition, intended to retroactively credit God for the impulsive victory.

However, such a composition timeline is obviated by another possibility: namely, that the atypical behavior of Abraham is, in fact, the point of the story. For after having trusted God to protect his wife's virtue, Abraham appears to have been tempted into an attitude of self-reliance by his accumulation of servants—the “three hundred eighteen trained men, born in his house” (Gen. 14:14). Hence, his failure to consult with God before embarking on his mission to rescue his nephew Lot. When King Melchizedek appears to remind Abraham that God “delivered your enemies into your hand” (Gen. 14:20), the only implication consistent with the other Abrahamic narratives is that the patriarch's initiative was brash and unnecessary—Yahweh would have restored Abraham's relatives without any human assistance. This being so, God's move to formalize his covenant with Abraham in the wake of the latter's military victory must be interpreted as an effort to stifle the patriarch's experimentation with autonomy, not reward it. This reading is supported by the fact that Abraham does not resort to violence later when Sarah is again taken into the household of a local ruler.²⁹

That Abraham's righteousness is a work in progress is critical for understanding the most harrowing convergence of holiness and violent intent, if not action, in Genesis—namely, Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac. The meaning behind this much-debated passage cannot be discerned without taking into account its culminating place in Abraham's struggles to live in full accordance with his covenantal

righteousness. Indeed, if we reexamine the challenges Abraham encounters before the episode at Mount Moriah, we can discern that the ordeal is meant to seal a heretofore elusive unity between Abraham's faith and his actions.

Let us begin by returning to Genesis 12 and Abraham's first attempt to pass off Sarah as his sister; here, he is motivated by fear, which is patently inimical to faith, but he remains confident that God will restore his wife to him. In Genesis 14, by contrast, he wastes no time in joining the local rulers in the battle against the Kings of the East; in this case, he acts boldly but out of confidence in his own human resources—his small army of "trained men"—and not in God's power to deliver. Six chapters later he again asks Sarah to pose as his sister, once more acting out of fear but nevertheless certain that God will secure his wife's return. Yet in Genesis 21, after signing a treaty with King Abimelech, he does not hesitate to assert his rights before the ruler, complaining that his wells have been seized by the monarch's servants. If we recall Isaac's subsequent refusal to act likewise, we can recognize in Abraham's complaint an inferior audacity, one dependent on the mediation of human agents, not on God. Thus, we can see that Abraham never manages to combine bold action with a total dependence on God. When the sense of his own vulnerability causes him to act fearfully, he falls back on his trust in the covenant; but when he feels he is operating from a position of strength, he leans toward self-reliance and aggressive action.

Therefore, when God instructs Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the patriarch finds himself faced with an unprecedented dilemma: either he does nothing and disobeys God (uniting his penchant for fear-driven passivity with a total rejection of God), or he follows through and trusts that the covenant will be fulfilled somehow (uniting his capacity for boldness with a total dependence on God). In making his decision, Abraham is forced to confront the fear of death that motivates his least noble actions. Admittedly, Isaac's life is on the line and not Abraham's, but the death would still be his own in a very real sense. For by killing Isaac he would effectively destroy his own posterity, which is the only vehicle for his immortality as far as he knows.³⁰ Thus, when he chooses to obey and raises the knife over his bound son, he finally brings together in his person the readiness to act fearlessly and the determination to trust in God completely. His righteousness thus attains

a new perfection by evincing an obedience that is prepared to risk death itself. Of course, Abraham's mere willingness to slay his son suffices for God, and Isaac is spared a violent end. But the episode has a more powerful anti-violence message that is easy to miss. For if Abraham is willing to trust in God so thoroughly that he is willing to sacrifice the life of his only son, why would he take up the sword to defend that same life or any other? Indeed, it's quite possible that one aim of the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice is to underscore the faithlessness of Abraham's rash military rescue of Lot.

Other examples of violence in Genesis only serve to cast the book's overall pacifist trend into greater prominence. This is especially true of the slaughter of the Hivites, recounted in Genesis 34, an act that constitutes the response of Jacob's sons to the rape of their sister, Dinah, by Shechem, son of the Hivite ruler. The rape certainly had called for punishment of some kind, but the massacre of all the Hivites is plainly depicted as egregiously unjust. In fact, it involves just the kind of incommensurate retaliation that we saw critiqued in the sequence beginning with Lamech's murder of the young man and culminating in the Noahide commandment limiting retribution to the one who has shed blood. Without question, the sons of Jacob are presented as an army of Lamechs, their preoccupation with "justice" merely masking an excuse for demonstrating their power through violence. In the aftermath, the incompatibility of the carnage with patriarchal holiness is underscored by Jacob's condemnation of the act (Gen. 34:30) and by the revelation that the sons possess "foreign gods," idols that Jacob orders to be buried before the clan flees from the region (Gen. 35:2). On his deathbed, the patriarch reiterates his disapproval, cursing Simeon and Levi, the masterminds of the slaughter, even as he blesses his other sons (Gen. 49:5-7). Patriarchal pacifism is asserted, not negated, by the biblical account of the incident and the response it elicits from Jacob.

Just prior to the blessing scene above, however, the patriarch refers to an act of violence in his past when he tells Joseph, "And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow" (Gen. 48:22). The event alluded to is not recounted in the book of Genesis, although the word for "ridge" in Hebrew is the same as "Shechem," and so a connection to the slaughter in Genesis 34 has been proposed by some later interpreters.³¹ But that interpretation is complicated by Joshua 24:32, in which Jacob is

said to have purchased the land in question “for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.” The discrepancy between the Joshua account and Genesis 48:22 has led to speculation that the reference to the sword and bow in the latter represents an anomalous tradition or a corruption of—or even an addition to—the original text.³² Moreover, if the passage does actually refer to an ancient tradition, then the absence of the full account only serves to underscore the pacifist priorities of the Pentateuch redactors. As Alexander Rofé states: “It seems that later writers of the Patriarchal stories rejected these stories, because they did not fit the writers’ theological concepts regarding YHWH’s saving acts on behalf of Israel.”³³ As we have seen, the radical reliance on God to “save” is the justification for the overwhelmingly pacifist character of the patriarchs’ lives.

Even if we can account for the violent anomalies that thwart a pristine pacifist rendering of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we cannot escape the fact that the covenantal thread of nonviolence, grounded in a thoroughgoing trust in God, seems to have ended with Jacob. The slaughter of the Hivites marks a bloody turning point in the Genesis narrative, as the weakness of the solitary Abraham and Isaac has been replaced by the collective strength of Jacob’s many sons.

But in fact, the event marks not an end but a beginning, the initiation of the *holiness-power* dialectic that will define the remainder of the Old Testament. Until Genesis 34, the patriarchs more or less consistently have anchored a position external to the *culture-power* dialectic, grounded as they are in a unique relation to the divine *external/eternal*. Jacob’s expanding clan, in contrast to the small family units of his father and grandfather, constitutes something of a capitulation to the *culture-power* dialectic: the twelve sons and their families come to form a small community that can’t help but have affinities—including religious ones—with surrounding cultures. Hence, the loss of a solitary position external to larger social groups coincides with the resort to violence, and—as we saw in the massacre of the Hivites—a violence that is grounded in Lamech’s asymmetrical overkill. The fact remains, however, that the covenant cannot be fulfilled unless the descendants of Abraham go on to form a national culture, one that transmits a covenantal identity from one generation to the next. Thus, the major tension at work in Israel’s sacred history becomes manifest: how to reconcile the continuity of holiness with the continuity of power implicit in the promise of

nationhood. Unfortunately, in the immediate wake of the Hivite massacre, the odds do not look good for any resolution that can unite patriarchal pacifism with an enduring national culture.

Yet Simeon and Levi do not have the last word in Genesis, their brother Joseph does, and this is critical for establishing the terms of the *holiness-power* dialectic that will develop beyond Genesis. For in the story of Joseph, we encounter a narrative that stands out not merely for its supreme artistry but also for its compelling reassertion of the *external/eternal* position that unites holiness and weakness as well as its anticipation of the problems posed by the transition from righteous patriarchs to “chosen people.”

In Joseph we meet a favorite son whose visions of future greatness fuel animosity between himself and his brothers. Clearly, an allusion to Abel is implied, only this time, the favoritism that antagonizes is doubled: Joseph is favored by his father *and* the God who fills his head with dreams of success to come. Joseph’s righteousness is perhaps alluded to by his informing against his brothers (Gen. 37:2), but it is his dreams, suggesting a relation to the eternal (a relation made explicit later in the story), that attract the hostility of the community that is his family. So when his brothers align against him, with the initial intention of killing him, we recognize a tendency we’ve seen earlier in Genesis—the hostility of culture toward the righteous individual, the individual most closely aligned with the divine *external/eternal*. When Joseph is spared and sold into slavery instead, his ejection from the clan effectively re-instantiates the *external/eternal* position that was submerged beneath Jacob’s fecundity. That is, in being separated from his family by force, he achieves a position similar to that of his great-grandfather Abraham.

If Joseph’s righteousness is difficult to discern in his callow, boastful youth, it becomes patent in his refusal to sleep with his Egyptian master’s wife. Once again, that righteousness results in his ejection from the world of culture and power, as he is falsely accused of attempted rape and imprisoned. Yet his innocence, contrary to Girard’s reading,³⁴ is not the principal focus of the narrative; his guilt is never officially rescinded. (In fact, as we shall see later, his resort to deception is very reminiscent of the not-so-innocent cunning of his forefathers.) Rather, it is Joseph’s righteousness that is the story’s ultimate revelation. While confined, that righteousness—his special relation to God—emerges in his ability to interpret dreams. When he is called before Pharaoh to interpret

the latter's dreams, Joseph makes clear that his interpretations come from God and not from some autonomous gift. When Joseph explains that the dreams foretell of a coming famine, Pharaoh puts him in charge of the palace, recognizing the special relation Joseph has with the divine: "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" (Gen. 41:38).

Now this elevation of Joseph, in response to his relation to the divine *external/eternal*, would seem to contradict the earlier pattern we have seen in the aversion of rulers to the righteous patriarchs. Unlike Abimelech, who is anxious about Isaac because he knows the patriarch is blessed by the Lord, Pharaoh brings Joseph into his palace, making him a virtual co-ruler, for the very same reason: he recognizes that God is with the young Hebrew. What is happening here? Have the redactors totally abandoned the earlier theme of the hostility between the *culture-power* dialectic and the righteous individual? Not at all, that theme remains; only now, the culture under critique is the emerging Israelite community that has spurned Joseph.

We can discern that Joseph's power-critical function operates in the direction of his father's clan most clearly in the prankish deception of his siblings in Genesis 42-45. When his brothers come to Egypt seeking food during the famine, he accuses them of being spies and retains one brother as a prisoner until they return with Benjamin to validate their family story. That the captive brother is Simeon, one of the architects of the Hivite massacre, is significant because Joseph's prank is intended to model a justice that is not merely poetic but also pointed at the brothers' rash, asymmetrical vengeance. For although he accuses all of the brothers of being spies, he reverses the disproportionality of the Hivite massacre by retaining only one brother.³⁵ Later, when the others return with Benjamin, this counterpoint to the Hivite slaughter is underscored even more explicitly. After Joseph has framed Benjamin for the theft of his silver cup, the brothers—convinced they are being punished for the sin they committed against Joseph—offer to become his slaves. But Joseph immediately rejects this asymmetrical retribution, saying, "Far be it from me that I should do so. *The man in whose hand the cup [was] found, he will be my slave*; but as for you, go up in peace to your father" (Genesis 44:17; emphasis mine). The contrast with the brothers' overreaction to Shechem's crime against Diana is hard to miss.

Paradoxically, the brothers' abandonment of the pacifism associated with their forefathers has required God to anchor the power-critical position—now working in opposition to Jacob's sons—in the seat of pagan power, its former target. And yet—and this is important—Joseph does not act in accordance with the values of that power. Indeed, when at last he reveals himself to his brothers, he forgives them and even relieves them of the onus for his enslavement, attributing that detour in his life to God: “Now don't be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). In this way, Joseph not only restores the pacifist ideal of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, associated with their relation to the divine *external/eternal*, but he also eliminates a key ambiguity surrounding that pacifism. To wit, it is easy to read—and many commentators have read—the nonviolence of the patriarchs as a situational ideal, necessitated by their externality to culture and the resulting weakness. But in Joseph, we see the righteous individual choosing nonviolence—in effect, *resisting* the use of power—while in a position of supreme authority. He does not use his advantage over his brothers as an occasion to validate secular justice, whose unreliability he himself knows only too well. Through Joseph, we come to understand that nonviolence is inherently linked to the *external/eternal* position that stands in opposition to the *culture-power* dialectic.

One final detail in the Joseph narrative seals the argument that the brothers have become the object of a power-critique anchored in the *external/eternal* perspective, in effect, reversing the situation of their forefathers. After Jacob passes away, Joseph's brothers are overcome with anxiety, fearful of retribution in spite of Joseph's forgiveness and magnanimity. Much like Abimelech fretting over Isaac's unyielding passivity and inexplicable blessedness, the brothers are uncomfortable with a power that is not dependent on violence. So they send Joseph a letter pleading for forgiveness, appealing to their father's memory. Joseph responds by reiterating what he told them at first: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to save many people alive, as is happening today” (Gen 50:20). Joseph remains steadfast in his understanding of the implications of the *external/eternal* position for human behavior.

Yet if Joseph is unaffected morally by the events related in Genesis, it appears, unfortunately, that the same holds true for his brothers. That's

the main reason Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg refuse to see any didactic purpose in Joseph's story; they view his pranks as "a matter of style and not of ethics; . . . a form of Yahwistic play."³⁶ But the ethical inertia of Simeon, Levi, et al. does not render Joseph's "game," to borrow Bloom and Rosenberg's phrase, a mere series of amusements. On the contrary, if Jacob's trickery fails to improve his siblings' character, it succeeds in highlighting the daunting ethical reality confronting the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. For that project, we come to understand in the closing section of Genesis, involves transferring the *external/eternal* position from the righteous individual—who, by definition, gravitates naturally toward the divine—to a large social group whose members, like those of other human communities, largely lack this affinity. The incorrigibility of the brothers, then, is not a negation of ethical import but a signal that the dialectic involving holiness and power is one that will elude easy resolution throughout the Hebrew Bible. In fact, Joseph's union of pacifism and power will never again be seen in Israelite history.

Other commentators discern a clear moral motive not just in Joseph's story but in all the stories of patriarchal pacifism found in Genesis. Lind, for example, argues that the redaction of much of Genesis during the period of the early monarchy strongly suggests an ethical rationale for including the narratives of nonviolence. After all, he conjectures, the redactors almost certainly had available to them more tales of patriarchal derring-do than they ultimately preserved: "[A]nd if there were more, why did the redactors make this selection, a selection that scholars long since have noted was in tension with the later warlike narratives of ancient Israel?"³⁷ The only credible conclusion is that the redactors recognized a conflict between the moral implications of the covenant and the ambiguous realization of that covenant in the coercive Israelite state. For them, the origins of that conflict coincide with the emergence of an Israelite community in Genesis, and the tensions that arise from that development are clearly meant to background the events that follow in book of Exodus.

But before moving on to the flight from Egypt and the next phase in the *holiness-power* dialectic, it pays to revisit some of the implications of the patriarchal narratives for contemporary notions of power and resistance. As noted in the introduction, Foucault insisted that power was pervasive and that all resistance was a product of power itself. Yet

we saw in Genesis that a position external to power was indeed achieved by the patriarchs, and that this external position was anchored in a relation with the eternal, via a covenant with God, and typified by a rejection of violence. That such an *external/eternal* position was recognized as a form of resistance by power was demonstrated by the consistent aversion of local rulers to the patriarchs but especially to the most consistently passive one, Isaac. We saw a direct correlation between his externality and pacifism and his affront to secular authority. The latter identified mild-mannered Isaac as a threat principally because he insisted on depending on God rather than on power, violence, or the mediation of human adjudication.

Unfortunately, as we saw, this position of genuine resistance was vulnerable to corruption. The power-critical position embodied by the patriarchs became pressured by the transmission of the covenant from the righteous individual to a covenantal community, Jacob's clan. Inevitably, the sons of Jacob developed a hostility to the righteous one in their midst, Joseph, and sold him into slavery. Joseph's ejection, however, enabled him to recover the *external/eternal* position threatened by the community's success and anchor a power-critical position vis-à-vis the tribes of Israel. As we'll see in the coming chapters, this pattern of corruption followed by the reinstatement of the *external/eternal* position will typify the *holiness-power* dialectic that ensues. Genesis has established the terms of this dialectic by both positing the culture-critical nature of the *external/eternal* position and by illustrating the difficulties of embodying the ideals associated with that position—of holiness—in a community rather than an individual. Increasingly, the dialectical tension between holiness and power will tend to move toward a recognition of the latter as essentially pagan, that is, inimical to holiness.

One final observation should be made here, and it has to do with the issue of expulsion. By now, it should be clear that a key underlying theme—possibly the major theme—of the patriarchal narratives is the notion that righteousness always coincides with a movement away from culture. Remarkably, this connection is shown to be so crucial that it makes no difference whether that movement results from a personal decision, as in Abraham's case, pressure from second parties, as in Isaac's and Jacob's case, or even a coercive ostracization, as in Joseph's case. The dreamer's story, in fact, confronts us with a counterintuitive view of what Girard has described, correctly, as a regrettable cornerstone

of human cultures—the practice of expelling individuals who are different.

Genesis does not disagree with Girard's view, but in the story of Joseph, it suggests that expulsion can function to serve divine ends and may even be dictated by a threat to the *external/eternal* position. For as argued earlier, the size of Jacob's clan had precluded a key condition for holiness—namely, the exteriority to culture. This, in turn, precipitated a paradoxical sequence of events: the person with the greatest affinity with the divine was expelled, but that very "casting out" resulted not in the extinction of righteousness but in its development—its perfection, if you will. For it was only by expelling the "holy" person from the larger community that the total dependency on the divine—the *sine qua non* of the *external/eternal* position—could be re-established. In the case of Joseph, this restoration resulted in the salvation of his family during a time of famine and also the reinstatement of a power-critical agency within the covenantal community. As the dreamer himself explained to his brothers, God used the expulsion he had suffered at their hands to bring about good.

This divine use of communal hostility toward the righteous person has implications for biblical exegeses that tend to view marginalization as an evil to be condemned or corrected. Even Girard, who recognizes the inherent violence of all cultures, treats the expulsions described in the Old Testament as mainly occasions for revealing the innocence of the scapegoat.³⁸ It should be clear by now that, on the contrary, the Bible asserts that holiness can only exist in the marginal position, in a position external to the dominant culture, and it is the propensity for holiness that marks the expelled one as worthy of victimization. Thus, expulsions not only anchor a power-critical position but also restore the 'weakness' that disturbs the mythos of power by surviving outside of power in a *de facto* state of resistance. Later, we will see that power eventually recognizes this relation between weakness and the power-critical position and adjusts its strategy for neutralizing the *external/eternal* perspective with devastating consequences. But for now, on to the book of Exodus.

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 95.

2. Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 123-24.
3. *Ibid*, 123.
4. Alexander Rofé, *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 75-76.
5. Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 210.
6. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 146.
7. *Ibid*, 146-47.
8. René Girard, *Lightning*, 84.
9. *Ibid*, 85.
10. *Ibid*, 85-86.
11. *Ibid*, 86.
12. *Ibid*, 103.
13. *Ibid*, 192.
14. *Ibid*, 85.
15. Girard, *Hidden*, 148.
16. Lind, *Yahweh*, 130.
17. Foucault developed his notion of power as diffuse in relation to modern power, but in the story of Babel and elsewhere, the Bible shows such a concept operating at a much earlier epoch.
18. Lind, *Yahweh*, 129.
19. *Ibid*, 129-30.
20. *Ibid*, 132.
21. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox and Richard Kroner (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 185.
22. George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, vol. 3, ed. Edward F. Campbell, Jr., and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 30.
23. *Ibid*, 37.
24. *Ibid*.
25. Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 52.

26. A similar association between avoiding conflict and blessedness is conveyed in a sequence in Genesis 13. In that chapter, Abraham suggests to Lot that they part ways in order to end the quarreling between their herdsmen over grazing rights. As soon as Lot departs, leaving Abraham alone, God reiterates his promises to bless the patriarch and his seed.
27. Lind, *Yahweh*, 41.
28. Gard Granerød, *Abraham and Melchizedek: Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 151-52, 246.
29. Bolstering this interpretation is the fact that God's previous expression of support for Abraham followed the patriarch's decision to part with Lot in order to reduce conflicts involving their herdsmen.
30. Ishmael is out of the picture by this point.
31. James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 429-31.
32. Hinckley G. Mitchell, *Genesis, The Bible for Home and School* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 353-54n22.
33. Rofé, *Pentateuch*, 130-31.
34. Girard, *Lightning*, 110.
35. In trying to convince Jacob to allow Benjamin to return to Egypt with him, Reuben offers his father a deal that underscores the need for Joseph's tough-love "intervention" — "Kill my two sons, if I don't bring him [back] to you" (Gen. 42:37). Jacob, understandably, declines the offer.
36. Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg, *The Book of J* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 236.
37. Lind, *Yahweh*, 45.
38. Girard, *Lightning*, 114.